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Nonviolence as a Tradition of Moral Praxis

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The just war tradition, never formally declared as doctrine by the magisterium, has a venerable place in Catholic social thought.¹ Though various other streams have animated the Church’s teaching on war and peace at different points of history—pacifism and holy war are the two alternatives most often identified—just war has taken a historic place of privilege. It has achieved this place of privilege through its development over time. It has ancient roots in the writings of Aristotle and Cicero, but was taken up first by Christians with St. Ambrose and St. Augustine and codified and developed significantly by St. Thomas Aquinas and the School of Salamanca, especially Francisco de Vitoria and Francisco de Suarez. Contemporary Catholic social teaching has reaffirmed repeatedly the principles of just war, even as the magisterium has demonstrated an ever-increasing concern about the capacity of war to attain the approbation “just.” Though contemporary just war theory is commonly regarded as a set of principles—criteria governing whether war can be licitly engaged in (*jus ad bellum*) and the conduct of war itself (*jus in bello*)—it is best understood as a tradition that draws on a long genealogy of argumentation about the possibilities and limits of pursuing justice and peace through war and violence.

Charitably, the just war tradition has remained a significant part of Catholic social teaching for two reasons. First, and in continuity with its earliest elaborations, just war promises to provide a way of faithfully enacting Christ’s command to love our neighbors as ourselves, which has a special relevance to the neighbors among us who are uniquely susceptible to violent domination: the widow, the orphan, and the poor. Just war remains a part of Catholic social teaching because it allows us to demonstrate our love of neighbor by protecting the innocent from unjust harm by all the means at our disposal, including the use of violent force.² Second, and somewhat more contentiously, just war remains part of Catholic social teaching because it promises, along with human rights discourse, to provide a universal lingua franca for speaking in a pluralistic world. Even while states might not be expected to take up the “counsel of perfection” to Christian nonviolence, so the thinking goes, they may be held to limits set by a series of principles rooted in

natural law. Advocates of just war hope that their appeals to the tradition can serve as a check on war-making states, whether they agree with the underlying theological commitments of Catholic social teaching or not.

The first reason remains, in my judgment, one of the most compelling justifications for considering the ongoing relevance of the just war tradition.³ The second reason, however, surfaces a problem: no such *lingua franca* currently exists. The vision of an overlapping consensus free of comprehensive visions turned out to be a mirage. While we may work for multi-perspectival moral frameworks that acknowledge points of consensus amidst enduring difference, as well as syncretistic traditions that borrow from and support plural positions, there is no epistemic “view from nowhere” from which to ground normative claims. To be clear, the magisterium has never been seduced by this vision. However, I do think that it is plausible to argue that the Catholic appeal to just war and human rights, which are tied together both genealogically and conceptually, is motivated by its promise as a moral language that can speak across contexts and commitments.⁴ But, if anything is clear in our current age, it is that there is no a moral Esperanto that can seamlessly speak between cultures and contexts with equal obligatory weight. Rather, as many have argued across the theological, philosophical, and political spectrum, what we are left with are traditions of reasoned inquiry. Just war is one such tradition of reasoned inquiry that has enjoyed a long and prominent place in the moral evaluation of war by Catholics, as well as by many others. As sometimes happens with venerable traditions, however, the just war tradition has reached a point of crisis.⁵

In the following, I engage this crisis not by enumerating or developing the list of the deficiencies of the just war tradition. Moreover, in this essay I do not aim to displace the just war tradition as the preferred Catholic moral theory for thinking through questions of war and peace. Such an aim, in my view, is laudable. However, this essay has a more modest goal. In this essay I engage the crisis of the just war tradition by exploring an alternative tradition of the ethics of war and peace, that of nonviolence. In the following, I demonstrate that nonviolence is, similar to the just war tradition, best understood as a tradition of moral praxis. Just as the just war tradition should not be reduced to its criteria, neither should the tradition of nonviolence be reduced to a simplistic personal decision about whether or not to use violence. Rather, as a tradition of moral praxis, nonviolence draws upon venerable precedents and exemplars; it gathers around common presumptions about what it means to be human, what are the attributes of a good life, and how to

organize our common life; it performs dispositions and improvises repertoires of political action; and in these ways it holds an argument extended across time. Nonviolence is an internally plural tradition (it is the tradition of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Dorothy Day and Gene Sharp), but one in which Catholics will find faithful exemplars to follow. In fact, it is the pluralism of this tradition that turns out to be its strength and may, I suggest, provide good reasons for Catholics to adopt it more fulsomely.

The argument proceeds in three steps. First, I explain more fully what I mean by tradition by engaging the work of moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, social theorist Pierre Bourdieu, and theologian Kathryn Tanner. Second, I apply this definitional work by explicating nonviolence as a tradition of moral praxis. Third, I conclude by considering the current status of the tradition of nonviolence in Catholic social teaching and gesturing toward its preferability to other alternatives.

What is a tradition?

None have argued more perspicaciously for the foundational indispensability of traditions for the possibility of reasoned inquiry than moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre. Across several significant texts, MacIntyre not only reconstructs an Aristotelian-Thomist tradition, but makes a forceful case against the relativist emotivism and fragmentary moral discourse that typifies our contemporary age.⁶ It is only within traditioned modes of inquiry, MacIntyre has argued, that we have the epistemic foundations from which to judge what is true, good, and beautiful.

Famously, MacIntyre defined a tradition as an “argument extended through time.” Rather than a static point of agreement, MacIntyre defines tradition discursively, as an argument. He expands this definition to state that a tradition is an argument

in which certain fundamental agreements are defined and redefined in terms of two kinds of conflict: those with critics and enemies external to the tradition who reject all or at least key parts of those fundamental agreements, and those internal, interpretative debates through which the meaning and rationale of the fundamental agreements come to be expressed and by whose progress a tradition is constituted.⁷

Through the process of discourse, of argument, traditions identify points of agreement and from the foundation of those points engage others both internal and external to the tradition. It will be

immediately apparent to students of just war that the criteria we now inherit are the product of this type of process. The principles of *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* did not arrive fully developed. Rather, they progressed over time through arguments with both allies and enemies.

Under such a definition, traditions are not static, but are constantly responding to novel problems. “At any point it may happen to any tradition-constituted enquiry that by its own standards of progress it ceases to make progress.”⁸ When the previous answers fail to respond to novel problems, MacIntyre argues, we encounter an “epistemological crisis.” In the case of the just war tradition, we could interpret recent developments of *jus post bellum* and *jus ante bellum* as either evidence of the ongoing relevance of the tradition, or of its incapacity to respond to our increasing awareness of the ongoing and cyclical nature of violence in plagued communities. In similar fashion, the turn to “just peace” can be celebrated as either a development or displacement of just war thinking. These shifts attempt to respond to the changing nature of war. “New Wars,” according to political scientist Mary Kaldor, are waged against the cosmopolitan aspirations of the emergent world order: rooted in sectarian politics of identity, utilizing the tactics of terror, and financed by a globalized, black market war economy.⁹ New wars are not the great wars of sovereign states, but are local, intra-state skirmishes that ebb and flow on cycles of non-state violence.

The development of these new frameworks to respond to novel situations are the symptoms of the crisis, not the underlying problem. Diagnosed by MacIntyre, epistemic crises emerge when a tradition can no longer answer the novel questions that emerge and rational progress ceases.

It may indeed happen that the use of the methods of enquiry and of the forms of argument, by means of which rational progress had been achieved so far, begins to have the effect of increasingly disclosing new inadequacies, hitherto unrecognized incoherences, and new problems for the solution of which there seem to be insufficient or no resources within the established fabric of belief.¹⁰

It is my contention, though I can only gesture and not fully argue given the constraints of space, that the just war tradition is in such a moment of epistemic crisis.

The deep sources for this crisis are twofold. First, and most immediately present to Catholic social teaching, are fundamental changes in the social production of war: technological, economic,

and political changes. What we mean by war changed not only in quality but in kind following the advent of nuclear weapons. Even short of the use of nuclear weapons, war today with fighter jets, tanks, aerial bombardments, drones, and more is simply a different social performance than battles with spears, swords, and shields (the technologies in use at the advent of just war theory). Moreover, war today is transformed not only technologically but economically, involving vast chains of capital. The Cost of War project at Brown University estimates that the total costs of the U.S. wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan at \$6.4 trillion.¹¹ War making is connected not only to political decisions, but to networks of manufacturing, production, and sales that are invested, quite literally, in ensuring the use of their merchandise. Beyond the licit market in weapons, there is a vast underground economy of criminal networks that, as Kaldor argues, funds non-state actors in their violence. And, finally, in addition to these technological and economic changes, the geopolitics of war are significantly different in contemporary practice. As Kaldor has argued and research projects like the Uppsala Conflict Data Program have shown, wars are increasingly fought with and between non-state actors. There are continuities to be sure: the enduring patterns of ethnic and national chauvinism, the noble warrior culture that valorizes violence, and the ever-present temptation to callous disregard of the human dignity of the enemy. Still, the changes in the social production of war have been a significant motivating factor for the magisterium's steadily increasing critique of war making and call for war's end.

The second reason for this epistemic crisis is connected to the first but is more difficult to see. The just war tradition is no longer effective in constraining violence. This is due to reasons I have already mentioned: changes in the social production of war that the just war tradition was meant to analyze and the challenge of pluralism in moral discourse. I have already treated the first so let me take up briefly the second. Just war theory fails to effectively communicate across traditions, and thereby fails to constrain the violence it purportedly aims to curtail. This, I believe, is the deeper source of the epistemic crisis of the just war tradition. According to MacIntyre, traditions in a state of epistemic crisis must do three things to resolve such crises. First, they must invent or discover new concepts that resolve the epistemic crisis. Second, those new concepts must explain the reasons for the epistemic crisis. And, third, it must accomplish both of these tasks in a fundamental continuity with the terms of the tradition up to this point. Responding to the epistemic challenge of the just war tradition, some theorists have attempted to return to the first principles of just war theory, especially the biblical roots (rather than exclusively natural law). For instance,

some have attempted this approach by commending just war as a practice of discipleship.¹² One problem with this retrieval is that it does not resolve MacIntyre's second task, adequately explaining the source of the problem in the first place: trying to root the just war tradition more solidly in Christian theology does not solve the problem of pluralism. Another approach might be to root the just war tradition, again, in natural law. But, this move too runs into similar problems. Whether critically, as in Samuel Moyn's recent work on human rights, or constructively, as in Jean Porter's account of natural law, there is increasing admission that appeals to natural law are theological appeals.¹³ As I mentioned in the introduction, this challenge of pluralism has become an impasse for the just war tradition, and as MacIntyre might argue, it therefore requires either the renewal of the tradition or the consideration of alternatives.

Now MacIntyre's definition of tradition, as helpful as it is, has come under critique from various angles. Religious ethicist Jeffrey Stout, for instance, argues that MacIntyre overplays his hand in his critique of modernity and lament regarding the current state of moral discourse.¹⁴ Stout, alternatively, argues that democracy should be understood as a kind of tradition, and his subtle appropriation of MacIntyre is helpful for the case I am making here. Catholic scholar of law and religion Cathleen Kaveny takes this critique further.¹⁵ Kaveny argues that MacIntyre's diagnosis of the intractability of contemporary moral argument misses important dimensions of moral discourse, especially the indictment that happens both within and across traditions. Kaveny also makes a secondary critique, namely that MacIntyre's proposed therapy of fully formed communities with adequate structures of authority and traditions of reasoning fails to take into account the internal plurality of groups (like the Roman Catholic Church) that seem to fit all of his qualifications. Religious communities have "rancorous disagreements" internally—for example, the one playing out here in the pages of *Expositions*—and MacIntyre grants us few tools to analyze the moral discourse of indictment that often operates within these communities. In addition to MacIntyre's failure to adequately engage pluralism, both within and without traditions, I would add a further critique. MacIntyre's focus on the genealogy of reasons can obscure the idiosyncratic historical judgments that often add up to a tradition. In the case of just war, it is too seldom remembered that Augustine's articulation of just war theory was nothing of the sort: his "principles" were developed in an essay against the Manichean Faustus.¹⁶ This was not a careful, systematic treatment of the ethics of war. Rather, it was a polemical, rhetorical take down of a critic of Christianity. In his articulation of the principles of just cause, legitimate authority, and

right intention he could never have anticipated the ways they may have been taken up later. More than a mere historical error, however, MacIntyre's definition of traditions as argument can obscure the affective, contingent, and embodied dimensions of tradition guided inquiry. This problem comes to the fore especially when we consider messy cultural practices like warfare that have changed in fundamental ways across time.

In order to make good on the original promise of traditions as reason-guided inquiry, we have to look beyond MacIntyre. Social theorist Pierre Bourdieu offers an alternative to MacIntyre's definition of tradition that takes greater account of the socially constructed, complex, and embodied character of inhabiting a tradition. Working from a common Aristotelian root, Bourdieu develops the "logic of practice" by focusing on what he calls "habitus," which he defines as "systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them."¹⁷ Bourdieu's concern is not traditions per se. Rather, downstream of debates in sociology between Marxists and Weberians about the relationship between social structure and ideology, he aims to account for the structured and structuring function of habituated dispositions, patterns that endure across time. We need not here to go down the rabbit hole of Bourdieu's social theory in order to retrieve his insight. Whereas MacIntyre fixated too narrowly on the history of ideas, Bourdieu offers a corrective that enables us to account for the ways that dispositions are formed sometimes without reflexive ordering. Bourdieu helps us focus on the embodied nature of moral deliberation: often an expert has a feel for the game without being able to articulate fully why. This Bourdieuan sense of cultural and physical embeddedness allows us to think across time with not merely ideas and arguments, but also material culture, exemplary figures and movements, and embodied practices.

To Bourdieu's account of habitus, we might add theologian Kathryn Tanner's account of tradition as an active constructive enterprise. Neither cultural artifacts nor the process of handing down of those artifacts is pristine. Rather, such handing down is always subject to human judgment, argument, and conflict. As Tanner argues in her book *Theories of Culture*, "One stands at a particular place in the ongoing course of [...] history and, looking back and across to what others have understood, [...] one forms judgments about the consistency of it all so far."¹⁸ Again,

thinking with the just war tradition, we should consider distillations of the criteria of just war as just this: distillations at a particular moment in history that look backward for inspiration to discern what to do in novel situations.

Together, Tanner and Bourdieu offer a constructive corrective to MacIntyre's mostly helpful account of tradition. Traditions are embodied arguments, extended across time. They are present not only in discourse but also in dispositions and repertoires of action. Points of consensus emerge not only on fundamental principles, but also on which tactics adhere to those principles, and which exemplars (both of individuals and movements) best embody the aspirations of the tradition. The just war tradition, as a tradition, is impoverished when it is reduced to a set of criteria. This impoverishment is doubly the case when we think of the tradition not merely as principles, but as an embodied practice. As an embodied practice, the tradition has primarily functioned to justify wars and the production of cultural and structural violence, in spite of rare moments of constraint and protection of the innocent. The impoverishment of the just war tradition combined with its current epistemic crisis—its dual failure to speak effectively given novel modes of war making and in contexts of pluralism—ought to lead the promulgators of Catholic social teaching to consider alternatives.

Nonviolence as a tradition of moral praxis

One compelling alternative for Catholic social teaching, the authors of this special issue contend, is the tradition of nonviolence. Nonviolence, however, is a notoriously misunderstood concept. Often times critics conflate it with absolute pacifism, the abstention from war in any form even in self-defense; or, with non-resistance, the rejection of the use of force in political or personal spheres.¹⁹ Some have critiqued nonviolence as pathological and racist, and others have argued that it leads to forms of political inactivity and apathy.²⁰ These critiques, varying in quality and accuracy, largely miss the argument of this essay, namely, that nonviolence is not a one-time decision or total way of life, but is a tradition of moral praxis. As such, the tradition of nonviolence is an argument extended across time that draws on common exemplary precedents, returns to common fundamental presumptions, and improvises within a set of political repertoires to actively oppose violence without violence.

For Christians, Gospel nonviolence draws indelibly on the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ. The earliest Christians lived as a minority community in the

Roman Empire, aligning their political fortunes with the Jews (of which the first Christians were a part). In this context, the hard sayings of Jesus recorded by Matthew and Luke indicate a way of actively engaging injustice in the face of systematic imperial domination.²¹ Jesus was crucified as a political usurper (above him hung the mocking ascription “King of the Jews”) and his followers were seen as a political threat. It is certainly anachronistic to turn to Jesus as an advocate of nonviolent action as we currently think of it. Yes, Jesus confronted structures and even organized what we today would call nonviolent campaigns.²² But, he did not have access to the social scientific resources, both theoretical and methodological, that we do today nor the tradition of nonviolence, as I am reconstructing it here. That said, his life, teaching, death, and resurrection have been seen by advocates as one significant paradigm of or precursor to nonviolent praxis. As Pope Francis recently proclaimed, “To be true followers of Jesus today also includes embracing his teaching about nonviolence.”²³

Drawing the genealogy forward, the modern elaboration of nonviolence began with Jesus’s hard sayings. Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy developed an account of non-resistance based in obedience to Jesus’s command in Matthew 5:39: “Resist not evil.” Taking this as a starting point, Tolstoy advocated a principled approach to nonviolence rooted in the anthropological primacy of love. Significantly for our reconstruction of this tradition, it was Tolstoy (not Thoreau as some claimed) that inspired Mohandas Gandhi to take up nonviolent methods in his struggle in South Africa. Gandhi and Tolstoy had an extended correspondence, and Gandhi incorporated Tolstoy’s approach into his own.²⁴ Many contemporary accounts of nonviolence begin with Gandhi, and rightly so. None have crystalized more clearly and practically the political power of nonviolence than the Indian revolutionary. Yet, it is significant that in a critical moment of doubt and skepticism, Gandhi reported that reading Tolstoy’s *The Kingdom of God Is Within You* “cured me of my skepticism and made me a firm believer in [non-violence].”²⁵

While Tolstoy gave inspiration, Gandhi’s elaboration of nonviolence combined Christian, Jain, and Hindu sources and improvised something genuinely new. When attempting to name the principle animating the movement in South Africa, he held a contest. The winning entry suggested “sadagrah” which meant “firmness in a good cause.”²⁶ Developing this idea, Gandhi combined two words “satya” and “agraha” to mean truth-force, soul-force, or love-force. While Tolstoy’s approach was largely apolitical, Gandhi used nonviolence as a strategy to confront the British

Empire. He developed a movement of disciplined satyagrahis and successfully forced the British to return the Indian subcontinent to the Indians.

It was the success of this movement that inspired leaders in the Black Freedom Struggle in the United States. Through the influence of scholar-activists like Howard Thurman and James Lawson, both of whom made trips to India to study Gandhian methods of social change, the Civil Rights Movement's most prominent representative Martin Luther King was exposed to and took up the methods of satyagraha.²⁷ African-American activists learned from the Indian anti-colonial struggle and applied those learnings in the United States. Thurman reported on his Indian trip and advocated for active nonviolence in his *Jesus and the Disinherited*, a book that King carried, along with his Bible, in his briefcase.²⁸ King returned to the Christological root of nonviolent action, seeing Jesus as the primary exemplar for his activism, even as he drew on new sources, especially the tradition of Black Church organizing and the Christian realism of Reinhold Niebuhr.

The Black Freedom Movement was not the only vector of the development of nonviolence in the United States. The Catholic Worker movement offers another stream of nonviolence rooted in Catholic radicalism. Together with her co-founder Peter Maurin, Dorothy Day inspired forms of nonviolence that actively confronted injustice through personalist practices of the works of mercy.²⁹ The Catholic Worker movement endures today and serves as an incubator for various forms of nonviolent resistance. Two of the most prominent descendants of Day's nonviolent praxis were Phil and Dan Berrigan, who took Day's personalism and applied it politically in their actions against the Vietnam War and nuclear weapons.³⁰ Day critiqued the Berrigans for their destruction of property, questioning whether it was truly nonviolence, but such internal argument reveals the tradition at work.

In the last decades of the Twentieth Century, the study of nonviolence has taken a pragmatic turn. Concomitant with the work of Gene Sharp and Barbara Deming, activists have taken up nonviolence for practical reasons, seeing it as an effective mode of political change.³¹ The fruit of this turn to questions of effectiveness has born out in a recent study by Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephen that found that nonviolent campaigns were twice as likely to succeed than violent campaigns on the difficult political tasks of anti-regime, anti-occupation, and secession campaigns.³² A proliferation of studies of nonviolent change has followed from Gene Sharp's intervention, and the topic has been treated increasingly by empirically-driven social scientists.³³

The tradition of nonviolence can claim a genealogy that runs from Christian anarchist Leo Tolstoy to political scientist Erica Chenoweth. It is an internally plural argument across time, one that is not only about discourse but about repertoires of action. This genealogy betrays no simple agreement on fundamental questions. The tradition of nonviolence is irreducibly plural. Yet, there is a continuity betrayed through the handing down of the tradition.

What are those points of continuity? Let me name four: first, nonviolence is rooted in an account of the irreducible human dignity of each person. It shares this commitment, at least in theory, with parts of the just war tradition, but it radicalizes the affirmation to include even the enemy and illuminates how killing also violates the dignity of the person who kills. Because even the enemy is a bearer of dignity, nonviolent movements utilize what Barbara Deming referred to as the “two hands of nonviolence” when engaging enemies: with one hand honoring their humanity, and with the other taking back what does not belong to them.³⁴ The foundation of this dignity can be variously construed, but for Catholics, there are ample resources for affirming such dignity in the wider tradition of Catholic social teaching.³⁵

Second, nonviolence affirms the basic sociality of the human person. Because humans are already bound in networks of mutuality, we should aim to inhabit those networks without doing violence to others. Again, Catholic social teaching resonates deeply with this affirmation. *Gaudium et spes* is organized around the primacy of relationships: personal, social, institutional, and divine. Christians worship a relational God, the Trinity, and are drawn into relationships of mutuality with one another. For nonviolence, it is the fact of our relational interdependence that serves as a guide to the methods of engagement in politics. These two anthropological affirmations, human dignity and sociality, generate two additional principles.

Third, because humans are bearers of dignity and basically social, politics is enabled by the consent of the governed. Tolstoy, Gandhi, Sharp, and Chenoweth all agree that when the governed withdraw their consent from structures of power, those structures must change. While this gestures toward a general theory of politics, it is in its most basic formulation consistent with the complimentary principles of subsidiarity and solidarity.

Fourth, from politics to ethics, nonviolence affirms the unity of means and ends. Demonstrated compellingly by Gandhi, nonviolence is a prefigurative politics that assumes that the way we conduct our relationships currently generates future congruous outcomes. Given the sometimes tortured debates about double effect of the late Twentieth Century, this principle might be the most

challenging one to square with Catholic social teaching. But, it resonates with Jesus's paradigmatic example, especially his instruction to Peter that "all who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Matthew 26:52b).

This list is not meant to be exhaustive, but it gestures toward some fundamental points of agreement: principles that animate nonviolence as a tradition of moral praxis. Together, they suggest modes of standing against violence without violence. Moreover, I have begun to sketch points of continuity between the tradition of nonviolence and Catholic social teaching. To conclude, I turn now to consider the possibility of confluence between the tradition of nonviolence and the tradition of Catholic social teaching.

Nonviolence in Catholic social teaching

The primary question for some Catholic advocates of nonviolence is whether nonviolence can displace just war as the most relevant theological, moral, and political framework for engaging war, peace, and statecraft. A host of fundamental issues lie beneath this question of displacement. Can magisterial teaching change? Which tradition adheres most closely to the Gospel? Which tradition better allows the protection of the innocent? If nonviolence is to supersede just war as the framework of preference, significant definitional work will have to be done in order to clarify what nonviolence is. This essay contributes to that work by identifying nonviolence not as a one-time decision, a disposition of passivity, or a mere prohibition. Rather, nonviolence is a tradition of moral praxis.

The trajectory of Catholic social teaching on war and peace gives evidence of two significant developments. The first is the magisterium's acknowledgement that the material production of war changed drastically in the Twentieth Century. Not only with the advent of nuclear weapons but various other technologies that effectively obliterate the principles of proportionality and discrimination. The second development has been less readily acknowledged, but is an increasing sensitivity to the reality of pluralism and the need to work across religious, and non-religious, traditions. The initial response to this reality, in the mid-Twentieth Century, was to double down on the promise of natural law as a universal moral language that could sustain human rights commitments and the restraint of war through appeals to the just war tradition. The persuasiveness of this move has lately come under question, as even Catholic theologians have identified the

irreducibly theological underpinnings of natural law and secular humanists have critiqued the human rights tradition for the same.³⁶

It is in responding to both of these challenges—the scourge of contemporary warfare and the challenge of pluralism—that nonviolence presents itself as a preferred alternative tradition to just war. And, it should be noted, the magisterium has signaled openness to this possibility. Pope Saint John Paul II’s *Centesimus annus* (1991) initiated the integration of nonviolence fully into Catholic social teaching, as the Pope drew on his own experiences in Poland with Solidarity. The U.S. Bishops’ *The Harvest of Justice is Sown in Peace* (1993) continued this trajectory challenging the faithful “to find ways to take into full account the power of organized, active nonviolence.” While the U.S. Bishops retained the just war tradition, they significantly limited its sphere of competence and placed the onus on those who wish to use it to justify their use. Moreover, they named nonviolence and just war both as traditions. However, they have not yet articulated some of the key elements of the nonviolence tradition as described above, such as its integral relationship to the irreducible dignity of each person. Though they did not elect to choose one tradition over the other, it may be that now the bishops might reconsider which tradition best reflects the need for an effective response to violence in continuity with our commitments to following Jesus. Pope Francis has strengthened these moves in his own teaching ministry, especially in his 2017 World Day of Peace address, “Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace.” In the letter issued on the fiftieth World Day of Peace, Francis called for the Church to embrace active nonviolence as fundamental to its mission in the world. These are but a few of the many ways that Catholic social teaching has already begun to accommodate the positive call to the vocation of nonviolence. Such efforts at integration of nonviolence and Catholic social teaching ought to continue. I daresay, hewing to the tradition of nonviolence would enable Catholics to be both more faithful Christians and more open to a pluralist moral theory that includes both religious and non-religious others. Ultimately, the magisterium will have to decide whether the just war tradition remains a faithful and effective approach to the constraint of war-making in the contemporary world. Given the just war tradition’s liabilities (its overall ineffectiveness, its dubious alignment with the testimony of Jesus, and its inability to speak in contexts of pluralism), and the concomitant strengths of the tradition of nonviolence (its increasing effectiveness, its Gospel precedent, and its richer internal plurality) I find the latter to be an attractive alternative.

The argument of this essay is that we ought to understand nonviolence as a tradition of moral praxis. Catholic social teaching has already begun to participate in this tradition and has the opportunity to extend and develop it significantly. The magisterium can be part of this important work through their teaching vocation, and so too can faithful Christians who embody the tradition through lives that improvise with repertoires of nonviolent action.

Notes

1. Todd D. Whitmore, "The Reception of Catholic Approaches to Peace and War in the United States," in *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations*, eds. Kenneth R. Himes and Lisa Sowle Cahill (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2005). See also Matthew Allen Shadle, *The Origins of War: A Catholic Perspective* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011).
2. Lisa Cahill and Drew Christiansen both make this point in their essays in *Expositions* 12.1, though they come to differing conclusions regarding the ongoing viability of the just war tradition for Catholic social teaching. See Lisa Sowle Cahill, "The Future of (Catholic) Just War Theory: Marginal," *Expositions* 12.1 (2018): 20–32, <https://expositions.journals.villanova.edu/article/view/2318>; Drew Christiansen, "Just War in the Twenty-First Century: Nonviolence, Post Bellum Justice, and R2P," *Expositions* 12.1 (2018): 33–59, <https://expositions.journals.villanova.edu/article/view/2319>.
3. Sr. Anne McCarthy's essay in this special issue, importantly, challenges the compatibility between the just war tradition and Jesus's command to "love your neighbor."
4. Pope Saint John XXIII, *Pacem in terris*, The Holy See, 1963, http://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem.html. See also Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2012).
5. The "crisis" of the just war tradition is a topic of perennial debate. For example, see David Gibson essay and Matthew Shadle's response following the beginnings of the Syrian civil war: David Gibson, "Is 'Just War' Doctrine Another Victim of the Syrian Conflict?," *Religion News Service*, September 11, 2013, <https://religionnews.com/2013/09/11/analysis-is-just-war-doctrine-another-victim-of-the-syrian-conflict/>; Matthew Shadle,

“The Just-War Tradition in Crisis?” *Catholic Moral Theology*, September 22, 2013, <https://catholicmoraltheology.com/the-just-war-tradition-in-crisis/>.

6. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007); Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988); Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991).
7. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?* 12.
8. Ibid. 361.
9. Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006).
10. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?* 362.
11. Neta C. Crawford, “United States Budgetary Costs of the Post-9/11 Wars through FY2020: \$6.4 Trillion Spent and Obligated,” Costs of War, Watson Institute of International and Public Affairs, Brown University, November 13, 2019, <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2019/US%20Budgetary%20Costs%20of%20Wars%20November%202019.pdf>.
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13. Moyn, *The Last Utopia*; Jean Porter, *Nature as Reason: A Thomistic Theory of the Natural Law* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005).
14. Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 118–139.
15. Cathleen Kaveny, *Prophecy without Contempt: Religious Discourse in the Public Square* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 15–45.
16. Augustine, “Against Faustus,” in *From Irenaeus to Grotius: A Sourcebook in Christian Political Thought 100–1625*, eds. Oliver O’Donovan and Joan Lockwood O’Donovan (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999).
17. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 53.

18. Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), 137.
19. David Cortright helpfully demonstrates that historically, pacifism was a term that was coined at the beginning of the Twentieth Century to refer to the transnational social movement that opposed war. It was only between World Wars I and II that pacifism came to be associated narrowly with an absolute, principled rejection of the use of force. See David Cortright, *Peace: A History of Movements and Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 8–11. While some advocates of nonviolence do take up nonresistance, such as Leo Tolstoy, most define nonviolence as an active and contentious mode of politics.
20. Reinhold Niebuhr issued a famous, and largely helpful, critique of nonviolence. See Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960), 240–256. Ward Churchill characterized pacifism as pathological, racist, and suicidal, and the same critiques are sometimes levied against nonviolence. See Ward Churchill, *Pacifism as Pathology: Reflections on the Role of Armed Struggle in North America* (Edinburgh, UK: AK Press, 2007).
21. Walter Wink rendered an important interpretation of the “turn the other cheek” triptych in the Sermon on the Mount demonstrating that Jesus's approach to injustice was not one of submission but of active and creative nonviolence. See Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 175–193.
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25. Mohandas K. Gandhi, *The Essential Gandhi: An Anthology*, ed. Louis Fischer (New York: Random House, 1962), 206.
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28. Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996).
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30. Jason Bivins, *The Fracture of Good Order: Christian Antiliberalism and the Challenge to American Politics* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).
31. Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (Boston: P. Sargent, 1973); Barbara Deming, *Revolution and Equilibrium* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1971).
32. Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).
33. I treat this development, and its limits, in my book *Presente! Nonviolent Politics and the Resurrection of the Dead* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, forthcoming 2020).
34. Deming 207.
35. The documents of contemporary Catholic social teaching could easily be said to emerge from this fundamental affirmation. See, for example, Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes*, The Holy See, 1965, §§26–27, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html; Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, The Holy See, 1995, §34, http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html; Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate*, The Holy See, 2009, §11, <http://www.vatican.va/>

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